Sexual Objectification: Has Media Changed This Generation?

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“Over time, butts have become a thing,” (pg. 1) Jen Selter, one of instagram’s most trending figures with nearly 9 million followers, stated in an article done by Meltzer (2014). Meltzer (2014) points out how the female body standard of perfection has gone from bony to bodacious over the past year due to a variety of different celebrities. Kim Kardashian is an American celebrity known for her insanely curvaceous figure. Not known in part by her large breasts or six pack abs, but rather, her bodacious bottom. Kim’s bottom has been looked at by many as a symbol of perfection achieved by many implants and a variety of exercises. However, there are many celebrities other than Kim who are being brought into the media’s spotlight due to their increasingly large female parts and extremely thin waits.

Men are a major factor as to why women feel the need to look this way. It is not uncommon to catch a man glaring at your breasts while meeting you for the first time or turning around to see him staring at your backside as you walk by. A large number of younger women feel that in order to get a man’s attention, one must look like the women being portrayed to the world as the plastic celebrities. On a daily basis, Americans pass by multiple billboards and watch numerous television commercials displaying images of women with fake breasts and plump bottoms, but why should this all be necessary?

It takes an extreme amount of effort and money to achieve this desirable body, so many would agree it isn’t worth the trouble. However, the number of women attempting to change their bodies to match this unrealistic standard are increasing. Could this increase be due to their constant exposure to media? Are the men of this generation viewing the bodies of women more important than their personalities? Why do women of this generation feel as though their caring personality and friendly smile shouldn’t alone shouldn’t gain male attention?

SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: BACKGROUND AND SECONDARY RESEARCH

There has been multiple studies as well as many articles posted on the issue of sexual objectification of women’s bodies. The study Facebook involvement, objectified body consciousness, body shame, and sexual assertiveness in college women and men did research on whether or not men and women are more body conscious due to their amount of Facebook involvement. The study found that both men and women and increasingly more body conscious, but women are more susceptible to body shaming. Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, and Seabrook (2014) illustrate that newer versions of social media cause individuals to care more about their appearance, leading to the enjoyment of being thought of as a sex object (pg. 10). In addition to this, an article done by Melker (2013) illustrates how sexual characteristics are now increasing throughout magazines and are becoming more apparent and acceptable. In multiple recent advertisements from different magazines, it was found that most are sexually objectified (pg. 2). An article by Syzymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) point out the different criteria which lead to Sexual Objectification, pointing out the following:

Quinn (2002) reframed sexual gaze as “girl watching,” a specific, yet subtle, form of sexual harassment that cannot be avoided and is not under women’s control. According to Quinn, girl watching is a “targeted tactic of power” where men use gaze to demonstrate their right to physically and sexually evaluate women. The activity serves as a form of playing a game among some men; however, the targeted woman is generally understood to be an object, rather than a player, in the game. (pg. 24)

According to this statement, men believe it is a game to judge women based on their bodily attributes, which is further emphasized by Battis (2015) who proves eighty-eight percent of men have a positive view on breast enhancement. The article by Syzymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) also adds how social media illustrates a woman is only worth as much of the appearance and function of her body (pg. 29). However, an article by Gizowska (2008) points out a variety of different ways to make one feel better about themselves both on the outside and on the inside. Gizowska (2008) emphasizes that one’s appearance is only part of their attraction. The appearance in which one sees doesn’t reflect their personality as it does when other people look at them (pg. 2). A study by Graff, Murnen and Krause (2013) illustrate how magazines are now showing girls in tighter clothing and other, more sexualized clothes and poses to emphasize sexual characteristics versus that of previous years, further illustrating how unrealistic the body standard is for women living in the United States (pg. 571).

There has been a lot of research done indicating that a women’s purpose is to please their partners. The information found by Arauna and Martinez (2013) illustrates girls feel as though they should be submissive to their partner, which is proven in Szymanski Moffitt and Carr (2011)’s study which illustrates that the female body is treated as an object for use which only occurs when “a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” and further illustrating the depiction of women in society’s gender roles, which how women with “…certain qualities such as “submissive to men and fulfill their needs and wants, seek men’s protection, and accept responsibility for limiting and controlling men’s sexual behavior…” (pg. 21). According to Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, and Seabrook (2014), the more recent act of body shaming is causing a lack of attention to be given towards one’s self, stating:

“Instead of being attuned to their desires and communicating their preferences and boundaries, women with objectified body consciousness and body shame may be more preoccupied with how their bodies are being evaluated or how their bodies are serving as instruments for their partners’ pleasure… (pg. 4).

Similarly, the study done by Graff, Murnen and Krause (2013) found that women in today’s culture are determined their worth based on how attractive men see them to be (pg. 571). Furthermore, an article done by Scutti (2015) emphasizes the use of objectification accompanying images of the desired, thin appearance on social media. Scutti (2015) states “If we are exposed to images where just a body part is featured, and those images are also sexualized, we begin to think about ourselves as just an instrument intended to expressly serve the purpose of others,” (pg. 1).

Media is blamed to be one of the main contributors to sexual objectification due to an increasing number of media showing women’s bodies as instruments for visual pleasure. An article by Pappas (2012) emphasized how a woman’s body is seen in parts rather than as a whole by doing an experiment showing full photographs of both women and men before showing two close up photos to match with the original they had seen: one as the original and one with enhanced sexual characteristics. It was shown that women are, in fact, more sexually objectified then men because they are were recognized well with the enhanced photos by both the men and the women viewing the photos, putting a blame on social media. The article by Umstattd (2015) points out the problems associated with the extremely unrealistic beauty standards shown throughout different media sources; similarly, Graff, Murnen and Krause (2013) point out “A sexually objectified and unrealistically thin body ideal for women is frequently portrayed in U.S. media…” (pg. 571). As stated, the media is a considerable factor for many sources. Graff, Murnen and Krause (2013) emphasize that the media is used by women to find sources which display these types of sexual images, adding that “Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) found that 51.8 % of the advertisements in a variety of magazines depicted women as sex objects in that their sexuality was used to advertise a product, ” (pg. 571). Furthermore, Graff, Murnen and Krause (2013) point out that the increase in women sexualization in media is becoming natural and accepted, stating “…sexualization is now shown as a “normal” route to social and material gain in the commercial Culture…” (pg. 572).

Instagram and twitter, both popular social media sources for younger age groups, give the consumer the option to apply a filter to their photograph. Many other applications can be purchased to do the same, if not better, editing techniques. The study done by Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, and Seabrook (2014) illustrate how social media has given younger people the opportunity to “… craft visual self-portrayals and observe peers on the same screens as commercially produced images to learn what is considered sexy and attractive,” (pg. 1). An article by Arauna and Martinez (2013) does research proving that young people on social media are shaped by the amount of media they are watching (pg. 1). A variety of photos were taken from a social media cite and analyzed to see why the pictures were being taken and displayed. “…identities are largely created as display identities…” (Arauna & Martinez, 2013, pg. 178). Arauna and Martinez (2013) point out the following:

In their self-presentations, these youngsters seek to strike flashy, attention-seeking poses, and to that end, the gendered depictions they make of themselves tend to be modeled on those they find in advertising and in other audiovisual formats, whose gender stereotypes they often adapt and reproduce. (pg. 178)

Furthermore, “Girls create their personal pages intentionally and strategically and make decisions regarding what they want those pages to look like and what they wish their audience to know about them…” (Arauna & Martinez, 2013, pg. 178). Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, and Seabrook (2014) then point out how young adults are “selectively advertising by only choosing the pictures which display their most attractive angles (pg. 3). Similarly, Umstattd (2015) highlights how “…the models themselves can’t live up to their own pictures,” (pg. 4).

SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: PRIMARY RESEARCH, METHODS AND FINDINGS

I did multiple interviews as well as a survey to compare and contrast the view of men of an older generation to that of a younger generation. I wanted to find out if older males view women differently than younger males and whether or not their view is more or less sexually objectified. To find this out, I first interviewed multiple younger women to see their opinion on themselves as well as how they feel they are viewed before comparing that to what their friends thought of them. Next, I interviewed an older woman to find out what she felt about herself compared to the younger women of this generation. Lastly, I interviewed older and younger males to find out what their thought are on certain women, what they look for in women and how they act towards women.

I introduced a friend of mine to one of my close friends, “this is my friend Sarah, she’s pretty cool you should meet her,” I said to him.

*He begins to look her up and down.*

“Yeah she’s thick as hell,” he stated calmly.

Sarah is a nice looking girl with a beautiful caramel-colored complexion. After asking her a variety of questions I found that she sees her personality traits before her outside appearance. After asking her how she feels guys, or people in general, view her, she stated “As an object because that’s the stigma about females in general. Especially slim, mixed girls.” What my friend said about her lead me to understand exactly where she was coming from.

I spoke to multiple female friends of mine. Erika; an outgoing, crazy friend of mine was not as confident as I thought. I asked her if she was completely happy with herself and found she was not because other people feel she’s “not skinny enough.” And said she would like to not be “as fat because that’s what the world prefers.” She feels she is viewed “as an object because that’s how guys look at girls, they just want to fuck.” After speaking to a few of her male friends I found they did not focus on her looks, but rather her personality characteristics and (even when asked) did not have any negative associations with her body, but rather, the way she presents herself, being described as “obnoxious” and “a mess”.

Maddie, a close friend to Erika with a loving personality, was extremely insecure with herself despite the confidence I typically see in her. She stated that she is only “semi-happy” with herself because she feels she needs to work out more than she should due to her weight gain after her last breakup. She feels that she, and other women, are perceived as objects because “if you don’t fit the male *quota*, you’re not worth it in their eyes.” Again, I chose to speak to a few of her male friends. I found the only negative opinion on her appearance was a single facial feature, with little interest in her body shape but a lot of interest in the way she carries herself, stating “she gets too drunk and needs to tighten up.” They described her as “a cool person” although she can “tend to be sloppy” and needs to work on how she carries herself.

After interviewing an extremely good hearted, elder friend of mine, I found she was not happy with herself because she wishes she was skinny. Other than that, she did not talk about appearances what so ever. Rather, she talked of how she is proud of her “ability to entertain and care for children” and reputation for being a kind and friendly person. She feels relationships are regressing because “it is now nothing to sleep with someone regardless of how long you have known them, but hopefully there are a few men who want to be with someone for who they are.” She has been happily married to her husband since the age of nineteen; her first and only sexual relationship.

After showing Chad, a friend of mine with many past relationships, a picture of Cecibel Vogel (photo shown below), he stared for a moment before explaining “she got a fat ass … a FAT ass”. Later that day, I showed an extremely outgoing, overly honest friend of mine a picture of Cecibel Vogel, he exclaimed “she THICK AS SHIT, look at her waist!” before rapidly pulling out his phone and asking for her Instagram name. In contrast, after interviewing an elder man I have known to be respectful towards all women, I found he had a completely different view then each of the younger men. He did not like the look of Cicibel Vogel and would not look to date her because “her body is totally out of proportion.” He looks for a woman to have “a nice appearance” and “dress appropriately.”



Four of the five guys I interviewed between ages twenty and twenty five said they would describe an attractive woman as either “thick” or “bad” but both of the older males I interviewed said they would describe an attractive female as “hot”. Only one of the younger males I questioned indicated they open the door all women, and even then it was only at work. However, both older males I interviewed said they open the door for all women when it is appropriate.

After showing Brandon a picture of Cecibel Vogel and asking him what he thought of her he stated “I can’t see her face.” Similarly after showing Corey, another male friend of mine, a clothed picture of Adriana Lima, he did a hard stare and stated that “she’s fine as fuck” due to her pretty eyes and natural smile, but described Cecibel Vogel as “sloppy” with a “lack of self-respect” due to her bodily exposure. He explained that he wouldn’t date a girl who would post a picture like that. He explained that “an ass is nice and all but that isn’t what lasts forever.”

As previously stated, Pappas (2012) did a study on sexual objectification. Pappas (2012) used various photographs: one full body and two close ups of sexualized parts, one of which was slightly enhanced to look more sexual. These photographs were shows to multiple participants to determine whether or not they were sexually objectifying the women in the photographs. Similarly, Jayson (2013) did a study using eye-tracking technology to determine the lengths of time one looks at each part of a woman’s body. I decided to do a similar experiment showing both full body and partially nude photos of women to men of different ages to determine if there was a difference in immediate focus between generations. I did this survey on ten older males and ten younger males to determine the areas in which they first notice on a woman. It is evident that in younger males the attention changes drastically from equal smile and breasts to a focus on the breasts. The older men had a different view, their focus went from being mostly on the smile to that of both the smile and the legs.

SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the younger women I found that they are much too self-conscious, and although I see why they feel objectified by most men, the ones that care about them have no value to their appearance. From the elder woman I found she is only self-conscious with her weight but most importantly values her personality traits. She does not believe in the views of multiple partners that today’s age believes is normal. From the younger men, I found many (such as Chad and Mitch) gawked over woman’s bodies, paying little attention to her face, while Brandon couldn’t judge a woman unless her face was present. In addition, Corey didn’t like woman such as Cecibel Vogel who display their bodies for everyone to see because a nice body isn’t going to be there a lifetime while someone’s personality will. From the older men I found similar results. They could not tell if she was attractive or not due to only a portion of her face being shown and did not like the way her body looked due to her overly enlarged bottom on her small waist.

There were a total of three words were used to describe women: two from the younger generation (*thick* and *bad*) and one from the older generation (*hot*). According to the Urban Dictionary, a *thick* girl is defined as “a word used to describe a female who may be defined by health charts as "overweight," but still attracts mad guys because the weight is in the right places (hips, buttocks, and breasts) a female with too much weight in the wrong places (like a huge gut stomach, or double/triple chins) would just be considered fat,” (Dizzle, 2007, pg.1). Also the Urban Dictionary describes a *bad girl* as “A term used to describe a person (usually female) that looks extremely good,” (Ace07, 2010, pg. 1). Furthermore, the Urban Dictionary defines hot as “someone who is sexually attractive,” (ll, 2003, pg. 1). Although all three of these words mean somehow attractive in appearance, thick, a word used only by the younger generation, describes a woman solely based on her body shape.

Based on the information given on how often each male would open the door for women, it is obvious that the older generation find it more necessary to open the door versus that of the younger males.

Based on the graphs below, it is evident that in younger males the attention changes drastically for younger men based on whether the women are clothed or not, with their focus primarily on the breasts when their clothes are removed. The older men’s view did not change as drastically. Their focus went from being mostly on the smile to the smile and the legs. Moreover, younger men view a women with their clothes off much different to that of a woman with clothes on while an older male sees the difference and recognizes their body yet doesn’t completely alter their focus.

Although women are being displayed as objects throughout the media and looked at as objects by unknown men, women are not objectified by close friends or other people that care about them. The question I now have for you is whether or not women, themselves, are promoting objectification.

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